

FPost
12-29-72



Washington Merry-Go-Round



by JACK ANDERSON

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department is discreetly sounding out some of the defendants in the Watergate case about entering guilty pleas and settling the affair without trial.

It's no secret the White House would like to avoid the embarrassment of a public trial, which would spread on the court record details that have been limited so far to newspaper accounts.

The trial, if it goes according to schedule, would also run just as President Nixon begins his final four years in office. He would like to dominate the front pages with news of his plans and programs for the future. The last thing he wants to see are headline stories about White House complicity in the burglarizing and bugging of Democratic headquarters.

By pleading guilty, the defendants could avoid a public spectacle and save the White House embarrassment. The White House therefore, has keen interest in preventing the case from ever coming to trial.

Our sources at the Justice Department expect six of the seven defendants to go along with a guilty plea if the conspiracy and other charges are cut back enough. The lone holdout, our sources say, may be ex-White House aide Gordon Liddy. He's a tough-minded lawyer who would be disbarred if he pleads guilty to a felony.

Members of the defense team cautiously confirmed that the government is at least working on a deal. One defense source said there had been "informal contacts" between the prosecution and defense. "There are always discussions like this in virtually every criminal case," he said, "the sort of thing that goes, 'What would you do if...'"

Another defense source said a more definite offer had been made to one defendant but had been turned down. Subtle probing has been going on for months, but no "hard discussions" have begun, the defense sources said.

None of the defense team would speak for attribution, however, except for Henry Rothblatt, attorney for our men caught at gunpoint inside Democratic headquarters. He denied any approach from the Justice Department. "So far," he said, "they haven't talked to me. I'm ready for trial."

Meanwhile, the mystery deepens over who is paying for the legal expenses. All the defendants have high-powered lawyers. Rothblatt is an imposing trial figure who literally wrote the book on modern criminal law.

Another defense lawyer, William Bittman, was formerly the Justice Department's star prosecutor who convicted both Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa and Senate wheeler-dealer Bobby Baker.

Another national celebrity on the defense team, Gerry Alch, is a partner of famed criminal lawyer F. Lee Bailey. Alch rivals Bailey in both fees and glory.

Who is paying for these high-powered, high-priced attorneys? We have spoken for some of the defendants who told us: "We were told when we took the job that we would be taken care of." They aren't paying their own legal bills, they acknowledged.

But no one — neither the defendants nor the lawyers — will say who is putting up the money.

LONDON OR NOTHING — President Nixon's No. 1 campaign contributor, W. Clement Stone, has turned down an offer to become the new

ambassador to Paris. The Chicago insurance tycoon, who contributed an estimated \$4 million to Nixon's last two presidential campaigns, is holding out for ambassador to London. He has close ties with Prince Phillip and has also helped to establish boys clubs in England. The London post is now held by another multi-millionaire contributor, Walter Annenberg, who is expected to resign.

SEASON'S FLEECINGS — Some top bureaucrats mailed out thousands of official holiday greetings to friends and associates at public expense. At the Inter-American Defense College, for example, Maj. Gen. George Beatty sent official greetings to some 400 bigshots, including Latin American dignitaries, throughout the Western hemisphere. In the top right hand corner of the envelope, we found the warning in English, Spanish and Portuguese; "Penalty for Private Use: \$300."

At the Treasury, Comptroller of the Currency William Camp insists the public didn't pay for the hundreds of cards he mailed out. "We get our operating funds from the banks, not from Congress," said Camp. So it was the bankers who footed the bill for the Comptroller's Christmas cards.

TOILET DUTY — Newsmen with the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service are grumbling that they have been turned into janitors and watchmen by the Pentagon. A Defense Department memo to news supervisors designates them "Assistant Security Officers" and orders them to run checks on all doors to make sure they are locked, to check desks for classified copy and if necessary to police up "papers, books and other debris." One group of newsmen were ordered verbally to peer under toilet stalls and in mop closets for intruders at least once on each shift.